

## Resiliency and Post-Traumatic Growth in the Wake of COVID-19

**There are three different types of stress** (Columbia River Mental Health Services, 2018): **acute** (most common form and can be helpful in small doses; short-term; does not do extensive damage; minor symptoms like upset stomach); **episodic acute** (feeling like you are always under pressure; can cause physical reactions such as headaches/migraines and heart diseases); and **chronic** (ongoing stress resulting from long-term emotional pressure (can stem from traumatic experiences; you can become used to this type of stress; requires medical and/or behavioural treatment)

Stress reaction categories include **emotional** (e.g. anger, shame), **physical** (e.g., insomnia, nausea), **cognitive** (e.g., hypervigilance, rumination) and **behavioural** (e.g., restlessness, increased substance use). Department of Health and Human Services, 2016)

**The three Es of trauma:** An event, series of **events**, or set of circumstances that is **experienced** by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse **effects**. (SAMHSA, 2014)

A **collective trauma** is a traumatic effect shared by a group of people or an entire society that stirs up collective sentiment and often results in changes to culture and mass actions. (Kutza and Comell, 2021)

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** a mental health disorder that can affect anyone who has experienced or witnessed a traumatic event and continues to experience challenges and difficulty returning to normal function and has frequent incident-related stress or fear in times of no present danger. (Liang et al, 2020) Treatment should include evidence-based psychotherapy for PTSD to facilitate processing the traumatic experience. Trauma-focused psychotherapies are almost three times as effective as medication in treating PTSD. (Watts et al, 2010) COVID-19 is considered to be serious enough to cause PTSD.

### Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG):

- PTG is the ability to experience positive personal changes that result from struggling to deal with trauma
- People can emerge from trauma or adversity having achieved personal growth (Walton, 2020)
- Post-traumatic growth often occurs while we are still experiencing post-traumatic symptoms
- Look for positive responses in five areas: appreciation of life, relationships with others, new possibilities in life, personal strength and spiritual change

**Resilience** is the ability to adapt to, or bounce back from, extremely unfavourable circumstances. (Lu et al, 2021) Characteristics linked to resiliency include resourcefulness, connecting with others, coping with stress effectively and in a healthy manner, finding positive meaning in the trauma, helping others, believing you can manage your feelings, identifying as a survivor, self-disclosing the trauma to a professional or loved one, spirituality, available social support and good problem-solving skills. Note that many of these factors are under your control.

**PTG and resilience** are different and can work both for and against each other. People with higher resilience may experience less PTG. But PTG can also benefit from improved resilience. Resilience and PTG reinforce each other, but the positive effect of PTG on resilience can be undermined by emotional exhaustion. (Lyu et al, 2021)

**Self-care and coping strategies:** focus on six dimensions of wellness (physical, nutritional, psychological/emotional, intellectual, social/community, and spiritual); maintain regular activities outside of work; build in moments of happiness, gratitude etc.; nurture relationships; speak to trusted confidants; get professional support; seek moments of awe (e.g., inspiring stories, nature); exercise patience (reframe the situation, practice mindfulness, practice gratitude). **PTG takes time. Take things at your own pace.**